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WOMEN IN LOGGING CAMPS

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The lumber industry has been traditionally viewed as a "man's industry," but women were present and did participate in logging camp activities. Women's participation is not usually explored in logging camp research, yet women played instrumental roles in the continued smooth operation of these camps. The scarcity of recorded information about women in logging camps prevents a thorough examination of their role. However, through the accounts of Irma Lee Emmerson[1], a second cook at a camp near Coos Bay, Oregon, and Anna M. Lind[2], a cook's helper and flunky at three different camps throughout the Pacific Northwest, aspects of the female experience in "a man's world" can be better understood. In future interviews and research, more focus should perhaps be placed upon the women's role in these predominantly male communities.

Women first began working in the Pacific Northwest logging camps during the World War I years of 1917 and 1918.[3] Though the living conditions of camp life were difficult, these pioneering women proved through their own endeavor and efficiency to be capable workers. The jobs these women held, however, did not conflict with the traditional view of "the woman's place in society." These women were not unusual in the types of jobs they pursued, but in the fact that they lived and worked in a "man's environment," for they continued to work in jobs that preserved their femininity. For example, some women, often wives of loggers, did laundry for the men.[4] In some camps, a woman was hired to be in charge of making the loggers' beds and keeping the linen clean and mended. Enterprising women often worked up a trade among the loggers to do their personal laundry and mending, a service which was greatly

appreciated by the men and was added income for the women.[5] For the most part, however, women in logging camps worked in the cookhouse as cooks, flunkies, and dishwashers.

The cookhouse was an important institution in the success of the logging camps. Loggers were hungry people and demanded not only great quantities of food, but good quality food as well. In fact, to loggers, a camp was judged primarily by the quality of food it served.[6] A well-run cookhouse kept the loggers satisfied and was instrumental in keeping up a good morale throughout the camp. If they were not satisfied with the food served, a loggers' meeting would be called and the cook would leave soon afterwards.[7] With the change of cooks, a change in kitchen staff was often soon to follow.[8] Therefore, the kitchen staff had to be a hard-working and cohesive group.

The living and working conditions for the logging camp cookhouse staff were demanding and rough. The women lived together in their own quarters, the "flunky shack."[9] The shack was sparsely furnished with narrow iron cots, orange or egg cases for cupboards and stands, and nails driven into the walls for clothes to be hung up on. A wood burning heater kept the building warm. Each member of the kitchen staff worked for twelve days with every other weekend off. Though weekends were usually less hectic periods because most of the loggers would want to go into town for the weekend, meals still had to be prepared for those who decided to stay around the camp. Thus, half of the kitchen crew had to remain on duty each weekend. Work began early, at about 5AM, with a break at midday. Many used this free time to take a nap before beginning the preparations for the evening meal at about 3PM.

When the loggers had to alter their schedules because of unusual climatic conditions, so did the cookhouse personnel. During the driest part of the season, the camp went on "Hoot Owl," which meant that the loggers would get up at 2AM in order to put in some work before the humidity dropped below the danger point.[10] During "Hoot Owl," loggers ate throughout the day which put added pressure on the kitchen workers. They slept whenever possible, which was not often. Each member of the staff, the dishwasher, flunky, and cook, had to be specially diligent in order to get the job done successfully.

The cookhouse dishwasher was usually a man.[11] There was, however, a female dishwasher working for the Northern Redwood Lumber Company, in Korbel, California in 1926. Her name was Ida, "a plump and motherly older woman,"[12] who had been one of the first women to work in logging camps. The dishwasher not only washed the dishes, but also helped serve the loggers their meals and did other chores around the kitchen. For example, John Paul, the dishwasher at the Ticoma camp near Coos Bay, Oregon,[13] made green salad every night for the 60 loggers at the camp. Members of logging camp kithen staffs shared their duties to ensure that meals were prepared and served properly.

The official title of the job most women filled in logging camps was "Dining Room Girl," but throughout the camps, these women were known as flunkies.[14] A flunky waited on tables and helped the cook with food preparation. Her day started early and she worked hard. She began by stocking the breakfast tables with pitchers of fresh milk, butter, fruits and plates of doughnuts and cakes. Each flunky was in charge of her own tables, waiting on

an average of thirty-five to forty loggers during each meal. Just prior to the arrival of the loggers for breakfast, she brought out hot food to each table. As the loggers devoured their first helpings of bacon, hashed browned potatoes, eggs, and toast, freshly baked hot cakes were rushed to the tables. A flunky had the difficult responsibilities of keeping hot food on the table and the coffee pots filled. Sixty loggers eat, on the average, 300 hot cakes, bacon, 200 eggs, 100 pieces of toast, bowls of hashed browned potatoes, and lots of scalding coffee in less than 10 minutes,[15] so a flunky had to be nimble-footed and quick. After the loggers left for the woods, a flunky was able to join the rest of the kitchen staff in a hearty breakfast before beginning her dining room work. The tables had to be cleared and re-set and the floors swept clean. A great part of the morning was spent peeling potatoes - one pound of potatoes for each logger. Finally, the kitchen floor had to be scrubbed. After pouring hot water on the floor and switching back and forth with their brooms, the flunkies were free until three o'clock when they began helping the cook with various food preparation chores. In one camp, the flunkies had all the vegetables to prepare,[16] while in another, the flunkies made sandwiches for the next day's lunches.[17] Then, after the dinner bell was rung, each flunky would once again have to serve hot food to her forty loggers, refilling the plates as soon as they were emptied. After her dining room duties had been completed and the next day's lunches packed, the flunkies were free for the remainder of the evening.

With the Northern Redwood Lumber Company, Anna Lind had the combined duties of waiting on tables and cooking dinner.[18] Not

only did she flunky for thirty-five men in the dining room for breakfast, but after breakfast she left camp with the loggers to cook dinner for twenty-five men in the dinner shed. The dinner shed was a small building located at the top of a hill where log cars were loaded before being sent down to the logging lokey at the bottom.[19] Here, Lind cooked big meals of meat, potatoes, gravy, salad, vegetables and pie, a task which required rapid work in order to get everything ready in time for dinner. After dinner, the shack had to be cleaned up, the tables reset, and then there was the hike back to camp to help the cook prepare the evening meal.

Irma Emmerson was the second cook and the only female member of the kitchen crew at the Coos Pacific Lumber Company's Ticoma logging camp. Her days in the logging camp began at 4AM. At 5:30, a bell was rung to wake the loggers, at 6:00, the men started loading their lunch buckets and at 6:30, breakfast was served. Much had to be done in a short period of time. Emmerson not only had to help prepare breakfast in the early hours of the morning, but also had to help ready the lunch table by putting out loaves of bread, stacks of meat, cheese, fruit and desserts. The cook and Emmerson shared the cooking duties, with Emmerson baking the hot cakes and the cook frying the eggs. After breakfast, she baked about twenty pies for the following day's lunch table along with cookies or cakes, too. As second cook, Emmerson cooked portions of each meal while every other weekend she was responsible for preparing all the meals while the cook enjoyed his days off. Moreover, when the cook unexpectedly quit and later through the comings and goings of a series of cooks, Emmerson was head cook

and in charge of the entire kitchen. Thus, the second cook was subordinate only to the cook in responsibilities.

The cook was the supreme commander in the kitchen. According to Anna Lind, "Like the captain on a ship, the cook was in complete charge of the cookhouse. It was up to him to keep order and see that the work was done."[20] Though Lind uses the masculine pronoun in her description, women were also logging camp cooks. Lind writes about two female cooks herself: Both Christina, the head cook of the Korbel logging camp, and Marie, the cook in one of the few logging camps operating in 1935 in Nehalm, Oregon, were conscientious and hard-working women who expected the same effort from the rest to the staff. The cook's foremost responsibility was preparing enough good food to satisfy the loggers. The ultimate disgrace for a cook was to run out of something.[21] If the food was not good enough, the cook could expect to be run out of the camp. The cook also supervised the kitchen personnel and ensured that the kitchen and dining room were kept clean. Besides preparing the meals and making sure that the rest of the staff carried out their duties, the cook had to plan the menus for each meal and take care of ordering all the food, two tasks which to Emmerson were "the biggest headaches."[22] The cook's job was one loaded with responsibility and challenge.

Women did hold positions in logging camp cooking staffs but these types of jobs were not always open to women. Anna Lind and another woman were let go from flunky jobs in a Simpson camp out of Shelton, Washington, in 1929 because the new cook, "a holdover from the all-male cookhouses," did not believe that women should

work in camps.[23] Two male flunkies were hired to replace them. Even more so than flunky jobs, jobs as cooks were reserved for men. Though Anna Lind had had experience as a cook and though camp jobs were plentiful and easy to find in the late 1920's, she had to settle for a flunky job in Washington as there were not many openings for women cooks unless one was a part of a husband and wife team.[24] When the head cook of the Ticoma camp left, Emmerson was asked to fill in until another man could be hired. After a string of cooks came and left, Emmerson herself was offered the job. She responded with, "We-ell, But only for a few weeks, Boss, Just until some qualified man comes along."[25] Her response reveals the prevailing attitude that women were not capable of holding a leadership position such as this one. Emmerson proved time and time again that she could prepare a successful meal on her own. Moreover, she enjoyed the challenge of getting a good meal on the table against all odds, and yet she did not consider herself or any other woman capable of handling the job on a regular basis.

When women did get jobs in logging camps that had been previously reserved for men, they were expected to maintain their femininity. As Emmerson writes,"If you worked at the Ticoma logging camp, in the eyes of the loggers, you represented the little woman at home and you had just better act like it."[26] Unaware of "the curious system of manners and morals in logging camps," Emmerson walked to the swimming hole on her first day of work wearing only her swimsuit without a cover-up.[27] Her reputation was nearly ruined by this behavior, because loggers did not consider it to be lady-like. Instead of becoming more "masculine" in dress, speech, and attitude as might be expected

with their submergence in an almost all-male community, these women tried to conform to the traditional image of womanhood:

> Living up to a logger's idea of a lady was an exacting business I discovered very soon. No hijinks at all. Not even a good hearty "damn" now and then. If you were a lady, you could not use any expression stronger than "oh dear," except under the strongest provocation. Nor could you wear pants or tight fitting sweaters around the cookhouse. Even uniforms were out. Not feminine enough. You wore starchy cotton dresses, preferably of rose pink, daffodil yellow or cornflower blue. You never went anywhere near the bunkhouses unless a logger was gravely sick and your ministrations were needed. You could not even go near the loggers' work, during a weekday, unless by special arrangement and accompanied by one of the bosses, although on Sunday it was proper to go out and exclaim in wonder at the magnificent job they were doing if a logger invited and accompanied you.[28]

These women, regardless of their rough living conditions, had to fill the female role which persisted throughout the rest of society. Perhaps because these women were living in an environment which would tend to eliminate the differences between the sexes, the provocation was strong for a woman to continue to speak and dress "like a lady." In a "man's world" such as the logging camp, being a woman was unique. The differences between the sexes were delineated and stressed. Women who had gotten jobs in camps were not allowed to trespass further into the man's domain, thus being kept away from the male residences, the bunkhouses, and the male place of work; "Women are not welcome around the works. We all had orders to keep away from them on weekdays."[29] On unusual occassions women were permitted to view the worksite but were expected to point out the differences between men and women by expressing awe in the

accomplishments of men, something they could never attain themselves. Though women had broken through the barrier which prevented them from working in logging camps, they had not been able to break away from their traditional societal role.

Most women who worked in logging camps ended their careers by marrying one of the loggers they had formerly served in the cookhouse. Both Emmerson and Lind met their husbands in logging camps as did many of their co-workers. The idea that women might be working in logging camps for the sole purpose of finding a husband was, however, viewed with disfavor. There was also strong disapproval against the female members of the kitchen staff's flirting with the loggers:

> A woman was frowned sternly upon if she had more than one logger on the string at a time or played one off against another. Instead, you were expected to smile impersonally on all of them and take care not to slip anyone an extra large apple dumpling.[30]

Jealousy over a woman could cause fighting among the loggers and therefore, the women were expected to remain on equal terms with all the loggers.[31] Though a "certain amount of hanky panky went on,"[32] there were relatively few sexual relationships taking place between the loggers and kitchen crew. There were those women though who took advantage of the wonderful opportunity offered them to have so many men interested in them.[33] Still other women came to work in the logging camps in the hopes of meeting and marrying a rich lumber tycoon.[34] Most, however, were not lecherous or calculating. The fact that so many women ended up marrying loggers is not surprising. Afterall, if a woman was

interested in marriage and was working in a camp, her choice was basically limited to loggers as those were the men with whom she would most likely socialize.

The social life of the logging camps centered around both the outdoors and the cookhouse. Members of the kitchen staff enjoyed spending their free time between work shifts hiking through the forests.[35] Beautiful areas surrounding the camp became favorite spots for weekend picnics. When a logger was interested in a woman, he often offered to take her on a walk to a special spot he had found where they would enjoy a picnic lunch, because "in a logging camp there are no amusements and no place to take a girl except for a walk."[36] In the evenings, the loggers and the kitchen personnel gathered in the cookhouse for coffee and conversation. These evening coffee sessions offered the best opportunity for personal contact between individual loggers and members of the kitchen crew.[37] On the weekends, most of the loggers and many of the members of the kitchen staff drove into town. They relished the opportunity to get way from the camp, go shopping, and catch up on all the shows.[38] A well-liked and well-attended event was the Saturday night dance in some nearby town.[39] Groups from the camp drove to the dance together and enjoyed dancing with each other, for during the regular working day, there were few opportunities for interaction between the loggers and kitchen crew.

Women were participants in historic logging camps. They filled neccessary positions in the cookhouse, thereby infiltrating into what had been an all-male community. Women were not, however,

allowed to be equal members in that community. They were kept away from the main area of logging work and always maintained their distance from men through their behavior and dress. The fact that so little is written about women in logging camps is perhaps a further attempt (albeit unintentional) to prevent women from successfully becoming a member of a man's world. Few works about historic logging camps discuss women. Most do not even mention women except in passing as the wives of certain loggers. For example, the Paul Spivey notes,[40] a collection of clippings, letters, and memos concerning life in logging camps, contain only a few sentences which deal with the presence of women. According to Spivey, women were postmistresses, schoolteachers, storekeepers, and boarding house keepers in logging towns like Millwood, California, but nothing further is said about the lives of these women or the role they filled. Interviews which have been done with various people involved in logging camps are not very useful for finding out about women's participation. The interviewer neglected to ask specific questions about women and the person being interviewed usually did not offer any information. The little mention there is of women does prove that women were present, but does not reveal much about what they were doing or what type of women these were who decided to live in nearly all-male communities under rough and demanding conditions. In future interviews, more focus should be placed on women and the role they played in logging camps. Specific questions need to be asked emphasizing the everyday life in logging camps and how women were involved in these activities. My research has been based almost entirely on two autobiographical accounts by Irma Emmerson and Anna Lind, without which I would

have been a very frustrated researcher. So much time can be spent looking through archival materials relating to logging camp life without finding any substantail information about women's participation. This lack of available information points out the way that loggers perceived women in logging camps. Women were allowed to work in the camps as long as they were not a challenge to the loggers. Few women actually reached the position of cook, which would have put them in charge of the entire kitchen. Instead, women were under the leadership of men in the kitchen and were not allowed to further enter into the male community. Following this practice of keeping women separate from other spheres of logging camp activity, women's participation is virtually ignored in written chronicles of camp life, perhaps an attempt to exclude women from entering the historical record as well.

I have just brushed the surface in regards to research concerning women's participation in logging camps. Research about other occupations women held in camps and logging communities, about the contributions of the loggers' wives in logging community life, and more about women who served in logging camp cookhouses should be undertaken. Moreover, it would be desirable to find out if any women tried to challenge the logging camp status quo as outlined by Irma Emmerson. Interviews need to be conducted, as the existing archival information is lacking in regards to women and their participation in historic logging camps.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The Woods Were Full of Men. NY:David McKay Company, 1963.

[2]"Women in Early Logging Camps." Journal of Forest History v. 19, no. 2. (July 1975).

[3]Anna M. Lind "Women in Early Logging Camps." p. 130

[4]Paul Spivey Papers. ca. 1954-1974.

[5]W.C. Ruegnitz, "Relation of Camplife Conditions to Logging" The Timberman (Oct. 1919) p.63-64

[6]Irma Lee Emmerson, The Woods Were Full of Men. p.48.

[7]Ibid. p. 48.

[8]Anna M. Lind. p. 133.

[9]Irma Lee Emmerson. p. 75.

[10]Anna M. Lind. p. 133

[11]Ibid. p. 132

[12]Ibid. p. 130

[13]Irma Lee Emerson. p. 20.

[14]Anna M. Lind. p. 133

[15]Irma Lee Emmerson. p. 39

[16]Ibid. P. 105.

[17]Anna M. Lind. p. 133.

[18]Ibid. p. 130.

[19]Ibid. p. 130.

[20]Ibid. p. 132.

[21]Irma Lee Emmerson. p. 48.

[22]Ibid. p. 129.

[23]Anna M. Lind. p. 133.

[24]Ibid. p. 131

[25]Irma Lee Emmerson. p. 127.

[26]Ibid. p. 27.

[27]Ibid. p. 27.

[28]Ibid. p. 61.

[29]Ibid. p. 146.

[30]Ibid. p. 61-2.

[31]Ibid. p. 119.

[32]Anna M. Lind. p. 133.

[33]Irma Lee Emmerson. p. 105.

[34]Ibid. p. 80.

[35]Anna M. Lind. p. 131.

[36]Ibid. p. 134.

[37]Irma Lee Emmerson. p. 62.

[38]Anna M. Lind. p. 135.

[39]Ibid. p. 133.

[40]Paul Spivey Papers. ca. 1954-1974.

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